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ABSTRACT

An interdisciplinary focus on the teaching of African geography is presented in this module, arranged by three major topics. Topic I stresses the African view that water is the sustainer of life, presents a case study of the Nile River, and discusses the significance of rivers as natural boundaries that delineate political units. Topic II gives examples of the city as the symbol of modern life throughout Africa and presents information on East African coastal cities, "new" cities, colonial cities, capital cities, traditional cities, and rejuvenated cities. The challenges of urbanization and upgrading rural life are discussed. Topic III discusses economic and political independence. It presents information on how pre- and postcolonial Africa produced and distributed its goods and services. Also investigated is the economic potential of regional groupings. A bibliography, a list of institutions that deal with developing nations, and a map of Africa are included. (Author/DB)

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TEACHING AFRICAN GEOGRAPHY from A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Increasing numbers of geographers in the 1970's stress the interdisciplinary focus of their subject. Geography is more than the study of the earth-man relationship. It is also a synthesis of a host of disciplines and the way in which that earth-man relationship finds expression in economic, political and/or social terms.

Africa provides a unique opportunity for students to share in an adventure in geography which demonstrates the potential of that discipline from many academic perspectives. The ideas below are intended to suggest the vast possibilities of Africa in a geographical context.

I. AFRICA : The Environment (Rivers and Other Things)

The African has one view of his Continent. The non-African has another. Objective descriptions of the environment set forth by Westerners do not adequately or accurately reflect African views of the earth and its impact on him. Such Western views are numerous*. African views are less frequently available**.

Africans view water as the sustainer of life. Water exists in many different forms in Africa - as streams, rivers, lakes, seas and oceans. Rivers sustain life in many ways. Flowing from source to mouth, they erode hard rock, forming canyons, valleys and flood plains. They lay new silt on old land renewing soil, thus favoring settlement, growth and development. They provide water for drinking purposes and facilitate transportation and communication.

Human technology has added to the many attributes of rivers. People build dams which generate hydroelectric power, facilitate irrigation and guarantee future water supplies. We now have it within our power to control floods, change the course of rivers and even to revive those which we have destroyed.

A: THE NILE AS A CASE STUDY

The Nile River flows more than 4,000 miles from south to north as it makes its way from its sources - in East Central Africa - to its mouth, forming a delta as it empties into the Mediterranean Sea. "Egypt is the Gift of the Nile", and indeed the Nile is an exciting river which has played many roles in the course of more than 6,000 years of Egyptian history. The Nile basin extends over nine countries (Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt).

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* Robert W. Steel. "The Physical Environment of Tropical Africa: The Human Assessment." in Africa: Teaching Perspectives and Approaches. National Council for Geographic Education. Tualatin, Oregon. 1975

**Abioseh Nicol. "The Continent That Lies Within Us." in A.J. Snelton, ed. The African Assertion. New York: Odyssey Press 1968.

The Egyptian Government built the Aswan Dam in 1902 to store the Nile flood waters. It was made higher in 1907. The one billion dollar "new" high Aswan Dam took ten years to complete and opened, south of the old dam, in January 1970. Water, backed up behind the dam, is stored in Lake Nasser, a 300-mile long body of water.

Much of the soil carried in the erosion process is drained out as silt into Lake Nasser, thus interfering with the deposition process farther downstream and diminishing soil fertility. Lagoons, previously protecting the coast, are now being eroded by the Mediterranean and remedies are urgently needed. Egyptian farmers have poured large quantities of free water on their soil which has seeped into the ground and raised the water table. The greater salt content of the ground water has led to salinization and harmed some crops. The increasing salinization of the eastern Mediterranean and the decreasing silt content have endangered aquatic life. Also, fish losses within Lake Nasser from dense weeds are serious.

Nevertheless, the Aswan Dam has allowed a million acres of land to be brought under cultivation, has permitted intensive farming, doubling overall food production, has vastly improved flood control, has provided an even supply of water for bringing areas under rice cultivation, and has generated billions of kilowatt hours of electricity to support industrial and social development. But the Dam remains a controversial topic among geographers, economists, ecologists, politicians and especially the average Egyptian. The expectations for rural electrification, reclamation of new land and protection against coastal erosion have not been fulfilled. The potential remains but Egypt currently lacks the capital and technology for major projects. The use of the dam's power station and the regulation of the flow of water to meet the needs of agriculture and industry are but one example of potential conflicts of interest.

A joint Egyptian-American research program will attempt to find new solutions to these old problems. Time will tell!

Geographers expect both positive and negative effects of technological schemes such as dam construction. Politicians are less concerned with the implications of these projects. Students could well investigate other dams such as the Volta River Dam in Ghana, the Owen Falls Dam in Uganda, the Kariba Dam between Zambia and Rhodesia, the Inga Dam on the lower course of the Zaire River system and the Cabora Bassa Dam in Mozambique.

B: OTHER VIEWS OF RIVERS

Rivers also provide natural boundary lines delineating political units. The Congo River provides a portion of the boundary between Zaire and the Congo Republic. The Nile provides natural limits for part of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Other African rivers perform this function as do rivers in the United States and Western Europe and other parts of the world. Studies which identify these roles of rivers might appeal to some students.

Rivers often serve as a bond, uniting disparate people. The Niger flows through Nigeria, Dahomey, Niger, and Mali, while its distributaries reach into Guinea and the Ivory Coast, thus providing easy communication among different ethnic and cultural groups. More gifted students might research the peoples which the Niger brings together in a unit.

Jurisdiction over rivers has generated various local and sometimes national and international disputes. Disputes can involve the right to license, to tax and to tap water for irrigation purposes. The states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York in the United States have been in continuous conflict over water rights and how they can best share the water resources of the Delaware River System. So too in Africa.

II. RESPONSES TO MODERNIZATION - THE LURE OF THE CITY OR, URBANIZATION : AFRICAN STYLE

The city is the symbol of modern life throughout Africa. The majority of Africa's 391 million people continue to live in villages. Nevertheless, the rate of urban growth in Africa surpasses that of all the other continents.

African cities are the center from which most social, political and cultural change radiates into the rural areas. The growth and expansion of African cities is the basic problem of African urbanization.

Cities in Africa are as varied as cities elsewhere. They have existed since time immemorial. Cairo, today Africa's largest city, has ancient origins. So, too, have Bamako, Timbuktu, Jenne, Oyo, Ile-Ife and Kano. They are all located inland on strategic trade routes. Cairo, on the Nile, alone enjoys direct access to the sea.

East African coastal cities have thrived since early times, though Islamic contacts following the Moslem intrustions of the 7th century encouraged growth. They include Kilwa, Mombasa, and Sofala. Time and circumstances have altered their modern roles. Some no longer exist. Others are radically changed.

Africa's "new" cities trace their origins to European contact, beginning with the Portuguese in the 15th century. Their list is legion and they cover the landscape of the Continent. Among the more well known are Abidjan and Lagos in the West, Capetown and Johannesburg in the South and Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam in the East.

Everywhere the lure of the city is irresistible. Africa's cities grow larger daily as the rural-urban migration intensifies. For some Africans, particularly males, the city-experience is a must if one is to truly claim adulthood in the village community. For others, it marks the transition from the traditional world of the ancestors to the modern world of the future. The magnetism of the city is obvious. First, it offers the possibility of increased earnings and involvement in an individual cash rather than a rural economy. The idea of achieving substantial wealth is always present. Then there is the opportunity for better education which is the passport into the modern elite. The anonymity of the city permits a break with the customs and traditions of the past which is appealing while the presence of relatives and others who share common ethnic bonds facilitates the continuing ties with the past where desirable. Not to be overlooked is the excitement of city life with which the routine of the rural setting cannot compete.

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These rural-urban migrations have generated numerous physical problems including poor drainage and inadequate water supply. Economic, political and social problems have mushroomed too Unemployment is widespread encouraging the growth of slums. The extended family system coupled with voluntary organizations which serve the various ethnic groups provide a surrogate welfare system. Crime rates inevitably increase.

One African geographer* has categorized four different kinds of African cities - the "traditional" city which existed prior to colonial contacts, the rejuvenated city which fuses the colonial township with the traditional city, the "colonial" city, a by-product of colonial administration and rule, and the "European" city, reserved exclusively for European occupancy. Katsina in Northern Nigeria is a "traditional" city. Kano, also in Northern Nigeria is a "rejuvenated traditional" city. Nairobi is a "colonial" city and Johannesburg in South Africa a "European" city.

It would be challenging to survey the many cities of Africa and to apply these categories, perhaps extending them to cities with which we are more familiar in the West.

The anatomy of the city itself is another interesting assignment. In-depth studies of Accra (Ghana) or Luanda (Angola) offer interesting comparisons with Western cities. Addresses in African cities, for example, are post office box numbers. Often there are no markers on the streets, making it extremely difficult to locate a potential host/hostess. Why this should be is an interesting mystery which students will enjoy unravelling.

Africa's largest cities are Cairo and Alexandria in the North and Kinshasa and Johannesburg in the South. Addis Ababa is Africa's largest Eastern city and Abidjan in the West has recently experienced enormous growth.

Comparisons with Western cities of similar size offer new approaches to understanding the why and how of urbanization.

Below is a list of Africa's largest cities :

Cairo	Egypt
Alexandria	Egypt
Kinshasa	Zaire
Addis Ababa	Ethiopia
Johannesburg	South Africa
Lagos	Nigeria
Ibadan	Nigeria
Durban	South Africa
Abidjan	Ivory Coast
Capetown	South Africa
Dakar	Senegal
Nairobi	Kenya
Accra	Ghana

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* Derrick J. Thom. "Urbanization in Africa." Ibid.

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It is almost impossible to obtain current population figures, but students may enjoy searching out those which are available in atlases, almanacs, yearbooks, etc., and comparing them with Western cities of similar size. New approaches to understanding and appreciating the how and why of urbanization are possible.

Increasing numbers of African cities are changing their names. Banjul in The Gambia was Bathhurst. Lubumbashi was Elizabethville, Kinshasa was Stanleyville, and Ndjemena was Fort Lamy. Why this should be so is another fascinating link in the chain of events.

But there is rather widespread agreement that the challenge of urbanization is the challenge of upgrading rural life in Africa. The countryside must be made more appealing and life there enriched. How does one transform a rural civilization where life and techniques are adapted to nature's demands and where non-intensive farming with long fallow periods largely prevails?

Julius Nyerere has taken a first step in moving the capital of Tanzania from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma and stressing the ujaama villages as the center of Tanzanian life.

The rural to urban migration must be reversed or at least stopped. The real innovations will come in developing new lures which keep the village African at home. How to do this is the big question.

III. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE : THE POTENTIAL OF THE REGIONAL GROUPING

Every society devises ways to produce and distribute goods and services. In pre-colonial Africa there were various kinds of economies : hunting and gathering, pastoral nomadism, settled agriculture and production for export. Most Africans maintained a subsistence economy - producing or obtaining food for their own use with little or no surplus for trade. Colonial rule drew Africans into the world market. On the eve of independence most Africans were involved in a money economy as part of a world trading system.

As African nations increasingly achieved independence, Africans sought to expand production and to achieve higher living standards. But many countries whose boundaries were drawn arbitrarily lacked size, favorable locations and economic resources. Their economies were linked with that of the former colonial power and there developed increasing concern about "neo-colonialism". Neo-colonialism means foreign domination of large scale industry and commerce where whites, rather than Blacks not only own and manage the commercial plantations, oil fields, etc., but also have a monopoly on both capital and technical skills. Africans must own and operate their own economies if political stability is to be maintained and they are to benefit from economic growth and development.

Today there are 47 nations in Africa. They range in size from the tiny and newly independent archipelago of São Tomé-Principe to the Sudan. Sixteen of the 25 poorest countries are in Africa. African nations comprise 20 of the 32 nations judged by the United Nations to be so poor and so short of food that crop failures and high prices for grain, fertilizer and petroleum threaten them with bankruptcy and their people with starvation. The average per capita income is $223 compared with $604 in Latin America and more than $3,000 in the U.S.

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But Africa has abundant mineral and other resources. All of the world's 53 most important minerals exist there. Its iron reserves are twice those of the U.S. Africa has 42% of the world's cobalt, 34% of its bauxite and 23% of its uranium. Nigeria, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, is now the primary foreign source of oil for the U.S. Two-fifths of the world's hydroelectric power energy resources, including water, coal and oil are in Africa. It has 40% of the world's hydroelectric power potential. Africa is the world's leading exporter of many raw materials, tropical, edible oils, peanuts, cocoa and coffee.

African nations are anxious to achieve speedy economic development - to increase the output of goods and services so as to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty which embraces most of them.

The Republic of South Africa is, of course, a startling exception to the rule. It is the most industrialized nation in Africa and well-endowed with mineral, agricultural and human resources. It is the world's largest producer of gold and antimony, the second largest producer of chrome and manganese and leads all African states in the production of steel, automobiles, coal and nickel. It also has an efficient transport system, comprehensive health facilities, a high literacy rate and a high per capita income. Blacks outnumber whites by five to one. There are 18 million Blacks compared with 4 million whites and 3 million Coloreds and Asians.

The majority Blacks, as well as Coloreds and Asians are denied political rights, live on 13% of the land, and are exploited economically.

Elsewhere in Africa serious problems exist which militate against the exploitation of the enormous mineral and other resources in Africa's advantage. There is the absence of an infrastructure - transport, power and communications networks to facilitate rural and urban development and to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. There are unbelievably fragile soils which make productive agriculture extremely difficult. There has been unremitting deterioration of exchange rates. Only 26% of Africans are literate. The life expectancy is about 50 years.

One important African response has been the creation of regional groups which attempt to transcend the limits of nation in the interests of economic growth.

Some of the groupings are listed below:

ACP - African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (grouping of 46 countries)

CEAO - West African Economic Community (Niger, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal)

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States (joins French and Anglophone West African nations : Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Upper Volta, Dahomey, Nigeria)

UDEAC - Central African Customs and Economic Union (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Republic, Gabon)

CEPGL - Economic Community of the Great Lakes (Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, Zaire)

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Institutions designed to respond to the development needs of developing countries have also emerged. Some include:

UNDP : United Nations Development Program

IDA : International Development Association (U.N. affiliate-World Bank)

CIDA : Canadian International Development Association

DAC : Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - grouping of 24 of the world's most industrialized nations)

ADF : African Development Fund (agency for providing concessional assistance to the members of the African Development Bank)

FAC : Fund for Aid and Cooperation (development agency for the French Government)

EDF : European Development Fund (agency of EEC - Common Market)

ECA : Economic Commission for Africa (UN) (a regional economic development agency)

IMF : International Monetary Fund (UN) (promotes international monetary cooperation and trade expansion)

An analysis of the origins, organization, and activities of one or more of these groups in the context of encouraging economic development and independence is an attractive assignment. Questions such as what religious/linguistic/political factors encourage/discourage union are naturals. The periodicals Africa Report, African Research Bulletin and West Africa, as well as African Development are excellent current resources.

Implicit in such an enterprise is some basic appreciation of the elements which favor economic growth. Assuming that students understand that the number and quality of the labor force combine with available natural resources, and other factors, including agricultural and urban development, infrastructure and some kind of private/public enterprise, they can learn a great deal about Africa and Africans.

It is indeed true that geography as a discipline has sustained fundamental changes in orientation and emphasis in the past decade. Students will benefit from application of these changes to the substantive material which they encounter. New outcomes which are more conceptual and relevant are inevitable. They will also learn more about Africa.

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